

Sept. 23, 2012  
Albuquerque Journal

## **Washburn To Lead Indian Affairs UNM Law Dean Gains Senate Confirmation**

By Michael Coleman  
Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate on Saturday confirmed the nomination of University of New Mexico law school dean Kevin Washburn to serve as assistant secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of Interior.

Washburn, a member of the Chickasaw nation of Oklahoma, told the Journal he will start work at Interior in early October and is honored by the Senate's confidence in his nomination.

"It's a tremendous honor and an exceedingly daunting challenge," Washburn said. "My hope is that I can help tribes continue to pursue self-governance."

As assistant secretary for Indian Affairs, Washburn will be the nation's highest official in charge of Indian issues and will oversee the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Indian Education.

President Barack Obama selected Washburn for the position in early August, saying the Indian law expert has "demonstrated knowledge and dedication throughout (his) career."

Washburn told the Journal he looks forward to joining the Obama administration in Washington.

"There is a positive agenda in the administration and at the (Interior) department and I'm looking forward to seeing how I fit into that agenda," Washburn said.

Washburn has served as dean of the UNM School of Law since June 2009. Prior to that, he served as the Rosenstiel Distinguished Professor of Law at the University of Arizona Law School. He was also the Oneida Indian Nation visiting professor at Harvard Law School, and served as general counsel for the National Indian Gaming Commission from 2000 to 2002. He formerly served as an assistant U.S. attorney in Albuquerque.

Washburn earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Oklahoma and his law degree from Yale Law School.

The law professor said he looks forward to helping tribes across the country with their federal recognition process. Washburn also said he anticipates working with some New Mexico tribes over the next two years as their tribal gaming compacts come up for renegotiation.

Washburn sailed through his Senate confirmation process and drew bi-partisan praise for his professional accomplishments and inter personal style. There were no dissenting votes.

New Mexico's U.S. senators praised the president's nomination.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said Washburn was a strong choice by the Obama administration.

"In Kevin Washburn, President Obama has found the right person to fill the position of assistant secretary for Indian Affairs," Bingaman said. "The Senate's quick approval of his nomination demonstrates the broad support he has in Washington and around the country. Kevin understands the pressing needs of Indian Country, and he brings the experience and enthusiasm needed to meet those challenges."

"UNM's School of Law has flourished under the direction of Kevin Washburn," Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., a member of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, said when Obama announced

the nomination in August. “Like former Assistant Secretary Larry Echo Hawk, Kevin will bring to the position an in-depth understanding of the issues that are important to tribes in New Mexico. That, along with his wide range of law experience on the state, tribal and federal levels will greatly benefit Indian Country and the Department of the Interior.”

Carl Tobias, a University of Richmond professor and an expert in federal judicial and administrative appointments, said Washburn’s appointment makes sense.

“He really understands Indian Country and Interior’s role in working with tribes and individual Native Americans,” Tobias told the Journal. “He carries a lot of respect throughout the West and seems like a great fit for this job.”

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